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# Maine NRCS Conservation News

Natural Resources Conservation Service

[www.me.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.me.nrcs.usda.gov)

May 2014

## A Note from the State Conservationist—

Greetings! I'd like to bring you up to date on what has been transpiring in our Agency for the last few months.

The new Farm Bill finally got passed and signed by the President on February 7, 2014. While the program rules are changing, our field office employees are still engaged with producers writing conservation plans that will help them improve their operations and also qualify them for financial assistance.

The Farm Bill conservation programs were consolidated from 23 programs to 13, but the opportunities are still there for producers to do almost anything they need to do to implement their conservation plans. The old Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) was wrapped into the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and part of the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is going into the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and part into the new Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Also consolidated into ACEP is the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). Veterans will get some increased access to our programs, and we have a new partnership program called the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

Overall, the program improvements will be great for our producers, and although the 10-year funding drops \$6 billion in the conservation title, it is still a strong conservation commitment from Congress, and we will do our best to get it implemented and out the door as efficiently as possible.

On another topic, our Administrative Services staff is facing significant changes in the near future. In November, NRCS Chief Jason Weller announced that the agency would be moving forward to establish 12 national service delivery teams to provide key administrative services.

We are nearing the implementation of this new plan. The design includes maintaining a core administrative staff in each state. The "local team" will include an Assistant State Conservationist (ASTC) for Business Leadership, a Business Services Partner and a Financial Resources Specialist. Additional staff may be added as each state's local team organizational structure is finalized. The ASTC position will be a merger of the State Administrative Officer and the Assistant State Conservationist for Operations functional areas. The key intent behind this new organization will be the ability to meet audit requirements through consolidated and specialized teams. Personnel will not be forced to move (will be allowed to "virtually work" from their current sites), and all personnel will maintain their pay. States will start announcing various positions for their core staff in the following months. We will provide you with more information as we transition through this process.

Employees who wish to follow these changes more closely can follow the Administrative Transformation community through USDA Connect.



JUAN C. HERNANDEZ  
State Conservationist

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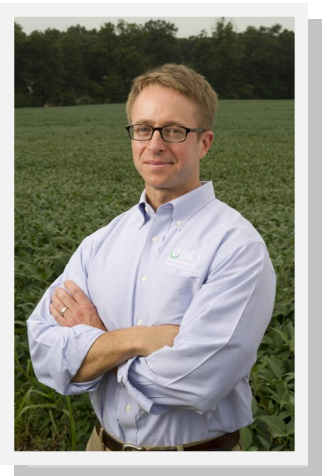
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### NRCS Chief Jason Weller made the following statement on the 2014 Farm Bill:

“At the Natural Resources Conservation Service, we are extremely pleased by the robust investments the new Farm Bill makes in the areas of conservation and support of America’s working lands. Producers will find that NRCS programs have been streamlined and are easier for them to use. At the same time, our field and national office staff will find that the new, simplified program structure will improve their ability to assist producers and NRCS clients.

The Bill continues to provide producers with financial and technical assistance and promotes conservation stewardship. It also combines easement programs to make them more accessible. As important, it creates a Regional Conservation Partnership Program that creates opportunities for partners to propose conservation solutions to local, state, or regional resource issues and work with NRCS to achieve results.



With the tools and resources provided through the 2014 Farm Bill, USDA and its partners will make a major difference not only in the quality of our natural resources, but also in the lives of farming and ranching families and the communities in which they live. I encourage any producer, or any individual wanting to know more about our programs, to stop by a local NRCS field office for more information.”

Helping People  
Help the Land





Below is a quick summary of changes made to conservation programs in the new Farm Bill, enacted on February 7, 2014. These programs are administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. The new Farm Bill streamlines conservation programs that enable farmers, ranchers and forest landowners to get assistance.

To get started with NRCS, visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted) or visit your local USDA service center.

	Previous Farm Bill	vs.	New and Streamlined Farm Bill
Financial Assistance	Environmental Quality Incentives Program	.....>	Environmental Quality Incentives Program
	Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program		
	Conservation Stewardship Program		Conservation Stewardship Program
	Agricultural Management Assistance	.....>	Agricultural Management Assistance
Easements	Wetlands Reserve Program	.....>	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
	Grassland Reserve Program		
	Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program		
	Healthy Forests Reserve Program	.....>	Healthy Forests Reserve Program
Partnerships	Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative	.....>	Regional Conservation Partnership Program
	Agricultural Water Enhancement Program		
	Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative		
	Great Lakes Basin Program		
Other	Technical Service Providers	.....>	Technical Service Providers
	Conservation Innovation Grants	.....>	Conservation Innovation Grants
	Agriculture Conservation Experienced Services Program	.....>	Agriculture Conservation Experienced Services Program
	Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program – administered by Farm Service Agency	.....>	Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program
	Emergency Watershed Protection Program*	.....>	Emergency Watershed Protection Program*
	Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program*	.....>	Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program*

\*EWP and Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program are not Farm Bill programs but are offered by NRCS; Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program was funded through the 2014 Farm Bill.



## Program Application Deadline for Fiscal Year 2015

With the program changes that have taken place under the new Farm Bill, and the changes in national and state initiatives, Maine NRCS has consolidated and changed the deadlines for program applications.

The Fiscal Year 2015 funding consideration application deadline for most **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** fund pool categories will be **August 15, 2014**. This does not include the EQIP National Water Quality Initiative and Conservation Innovation Grants. These deadlines are yet to be determined.

EQIP categories that are included in the August 15th signup deadline, in addition to the “general” local pool categories (such as animal waste, cropland, forestry, seasonal high tunnels, pasture, and wildlife), are: Beginning Farmer, Socially Disadvantaged, Tribal Projects, Water Conservation/Irrigation, Aquatic Organism Passage projects, Conservation Activity Plans, On-Farm Energy and Organic. Previously these categories had a different application deadline from the EQIP “general” category.

The **Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA)** will also have a Fiscal Year 2015 funding consideration application deadline of **August 15, 2014**. For 2015 we will continue to provide AMA funding for new irrigation projects, but will also be introducing opportunity for funding deer exclusion fencing for orchards.

Applications received for these two programs after the August 15, 2014 deadline will be considered for funding in Fiscal Year 2016. The application deadline for Fiscal Year 2016 applications will be August 15, 2015.

The deadlines are yet to be determined for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). However, applications are being accepted on a continuous basis. The deadlines for these two programs will be announced when determined.



*This landowner in **Franklin County** replaced his temporary stream crossing (above) with a stabilized stream crossing (below) with assistance from NRCS. The new crossing will reduce streambank and streambed erosion, improve water quality by reducing sediment, and provide for better access to his forestland.*



*(Right photo): The rocks were removed and the ground leveled on a 9-acre wild lowbush blueberry field in **Hancock County**. Rock piles left in the field are either located on surface bedrock or on rocks that were too large to remove. Rocking and leveling the field allows the farmer to prune the blueberry plants by flail mowing instead of burning the plants using 60 – 80 gallons of #2 home heating oil per acre. This greatly reduces air pollution from the burning of home heating oil and reduces costs to the farmer. Other benefits from the rock removal practice include increased ease of spraying, fertilizing, and harvesting the crop.*

## Personnel Changes January—May 2014

### Retirements

- Bob Evon, MLRA Project Leader/Soil Scientist in the Dover-Foxcroft Soil Survey Office, retired effective **January 11, 2014**.
- Skip Babineau, District Conservationist in the Fort Kent Field Office, retired effective **April 30, 2014**.
- Alice Goodwin, Agricultural Engineer in the Presque Isle Field Office, retired effective **May 3, 2014**.
- Lewis Crosby, Hydraulic Engineer in the State Office, will be retiring effective **May 31, 2014**.
- Mary Thompson, Soil Conservationist in the Belfast Field Office, will be retiring effective **May 31, 2014**.

### Reassignments

- Ron Desrosiers, Training Specialist for the National Employee Development Center stationed in Maine, was selected for the District Conservationist position in the Skowhegan Field Office effective **January 12, 2014**.
- Terri Teller, Soil Conservation Technician (Term) in the South Paris Field Office, was reassigned to the Lewiston Field Office effective **February 9, 2014**.
- Scott Englund, Soil Conservation Technician in the Presque Isle Field Office, was reassigned to the Houlton Field Office effective **April 7, 2014**.
- Kelly Schmiermund has been selected as Soil Conservationist in the Scarborough Field Office effective **June 29, 2014**. She currently serves as Soil Conservationist in the Centreville Field Office in Centreville, Michigan.

### Promotions

- Nick Butler, Soil Scientist in the Dover-Foxcroft Soil Survey Office, was selected for the 12-DFX MLRA Soil Survey Office Leader position, effective **May 4, 2014**.
- Tony Jenkins, State Soil Scientist, has been selected as Soil Survey Director for the Regional Office in Portland, Oregon effective **June 1, 2014**.

## May is Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

Visit [www.WhiteHouse.gov/AAPI](http://www.whitehouse.gov/AAPI) - <http://www.whitehouse.gov/AAPI> to learn more about the history of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.







**Soil health.** It is the oldest thing this Agency has done, and it is the newest.

Since the bleak and distant days of the Dust Bowl, SCS and NRCS conservationists have labored persistently, often passionately, to help farmers avoid the catastrophic effects of erosion, knowing as we do that over-plowed, un-tethered soil can be too easily swept away, and along with it the farms and dreams of our customers.

Today's farms are almost unimaginably different than those of the 1930s—whether measured by size, machinery, management, or the computer and GPS system strategically placing seeds and fertilizer across the fields. And today's challenges may be greater as well. The world's population is projected to increase from 7 billion in 2013 to more than 9 billion in 2050. To sustain this level of growth, food production will need to rise by 70 percent. To make it even more complex, you can add in the fact that between 1982-2007, 14 million acres of prime farmland in the U.S. were lost to development.

**What to do?** A growing number of farmers, researchers and conservationists believe the answer lies just below our feet in taking care of our soil ecosystem so that it can take care of us.

#### **Why does soil health matter?**



1. Healthy soils are high-performing, productive soils.
2. Healthy soils reduce production costs and improve profits.
3. Healthy soils protect natural resources on and off the farm.
4. Franklin Roosevelt's statement, "The nation that destroys its soil destroys itself," is as true

today as it was 75 years ago.

5. Healthy soils can reduce nutrient loading and sediment runoff, increase efficiencies, and sustain wildlife habitat.

#### **What are the benefits of healthy soil?**

1. Healthy soil holds more water (by binding it to organic matter), and loses less water to runoff and evaporation.
2. Organic matter builds as tillage declines and plants and residue cover the soil. Organic matter holds 18-20 times its weight in water and recycles nutrients for plants to use.
3. One percent of organic matter in the top six inches of soil would hold approximately 27,000 gallons of water per acre!
4. Most farmers can increase their soil organic matter in 3 to 10 years if they are motivated about adopting conservation practices to achieve this goal.

#### **Follow four basic soil health principles to improve soil health and sustainability:**

1. Use plant diversity to increase diversity in the soil.
2. Manage soils more by disturbing them less.
3. Keep plants growing throughout the year to feed the soil.
4. Keep the soil covered as much as possible.

**Why the new soil health emphasis?** It builds on our Agency's foundation of battling erosion. Now we are saying, not only can we keep soil from being washed or blown away, we can manage it to make it healthier so that it can feed us—not just today, but in 2050 and beyond.

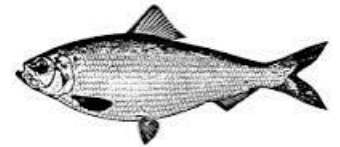


## Getting Started with NRCS

What steps do private landowners need to take to get assistance from NRCS? To make it easier for them, NRCS has created a webpage that provides the five steps that farmers need to take to get help. The “Getting Started with NRCS” webpage is available from the national NRCS webpage at [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov) or the Maine NRCS webpage at [www.me.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.me.nrcs.usda.gov).

## Stream Smart Road-Stream Crossing Training

Stream smart trainings are a partnership effort spearheaded by the Maine Audubon to reach professionals, communities and landowners responsible for road-stream crossings in Maine. The trainings provide the best information available on the installation of road-stream crossings to allow for aquatic organism passage and maintenance of natural stream processes, while also allowing for safe, low maintenance road-stream crossings that meet the landowner’s needs. Individuals who plan and/or design road stream crossings gain knowledge of state-of-the-art road-stream crossing technologies having minimal adverse effects on streams or their inhabitants.



Three 1-day Stream Smart Road-Stream Crossing trainings were held in April for NRCS and Soil and Water Conservation District employees. Participants had the opportunity to learn about the value of stream smart road-stream crossings, the legal requirements, how to create them, about project planning and management, as well as view different scenarios at a demonstration stream table. Besides NRCS, presenters included representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Maine Department of Environmental Protection, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The partnership will continue to provide training on this subject to land trusts, Native American tribes, forestry Technical Service Providers and the general public in the not-too-distant future.



*Dan Baumert, NRCS (left), and Alex Abbot, USFWS (right) provide different scenarios and their results at the demonstration stream table.*





## Bee Facts and Tidbits—by Mary Thompson, Soil Conservationist, Belfast Field Office



Many of us come in contact with bee hives while working around wild blueberry fields, orchards, vegetable fields, greenhouses/high tunnels, and the occasional homeowner. While attending the annual wild blueberry school in Waldoboro there was a presentation by Tony Jadczyk, State Api-culturist. He talked about his concerns for the transportation and handling of bees that are being brought into the state.



Honey bees are the most common bee brought into the state, though many people are buying quads of

bumble bees that are sent through the post office. Last year 74,774 hives crossed the state borders. Carrying the hives on flat beds is common and many of the loads are secured, but have no nets over the hives when the hives are delivered to the fields or farms or when they are picked up. There have been instances of bees swarming at nearby homes, swarming at gas stations during transport, and bees being left behind. Tony stated that it is the driver's job to make sure the bees stay in their hives. Bees should be considered hazardous cargo.

What does that mean for us? Bees are becoming meaner, more aggressive and California has Africanized bees that have moved into the state. The

males carry the “mean” gene, sorry guys. They are sensitive to vibrations, odors and visual stimuli, such as movement and color. A powerful stimulant is exhaled breath because of the carbon dioxide. Other stimulants are hair – must be hair blowing in the breeze, perfumes and the odor of leather.

Here are a few things to keep in mind if you are attacked by a swarm of bees.

- ♦ Do not swat at bees if they come to you...calmly become still and slowly walk away. Next run, cover your mouth and nose (how are you supposed to breath?), and head to the nearest shelter or your vehicle. Do not jump into water!
- ♦ A swarm of bees will chase you a ¼ of a mile.
- ♦ If you do make it to your car and a few bees join you - turn the air conditioner on, crack the windows and the bees will leave the comforts of your car. Tony assured us that this really works.
- ♦ If someone is getting stung throw a blanket over the person and get them to a hospital.
- ♦ When bees are left behind they get frustrated as they cannot find their home and they will eventually die. If they swarm to the side of your home, for instance, a solution of one cup dish detergent and one gallon of water sprayed on them will cause them to die sooner than later. Without a queen bee they just don't know what to do!

Tony is a wealth of information about bees. More information can be found on the state website at: <http://www.maine.gov/dacf/php/apiary/index.shtml>.

*Encourage one another. Many times a word of praise or thanks or appreciation or cheer has kept people on their feet.*

— Charles Swindoll





## 2012 Census of Agriculture Released

"The Census results reiterate the continued need for policies that help grow the rural economy from the middle out," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack on the updated 2012 Census of Agriculture data. "The data illustrate the power of USDA efforts to grow the economy and strengthen infrastructure in rural America, create new market opportunities for farmers and ranchers, and provide access to capital, credit and disaster assistance for producers of all sizes. The Census also shows the potential for continued growth in the bioeconomy, organics, and local and regional food systems. USDA will continue to focus on innovative, creative policies that give farmers, ranchers and entrepreneurs the tools they need to attract a bright and diverse body of talent to rural America."

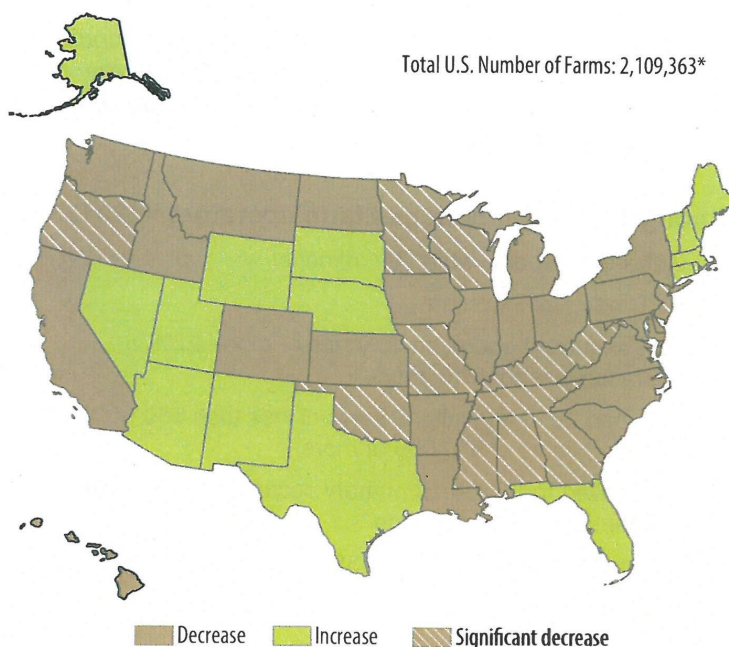
Highlights of the 2012 Census of Agriculture data for Maine include:

- In 2012, Maine had 8,173 farms—compared to 8,136 farms from the last agricultural Census in 2007, an increase of 37 farms, or less than 1 percent.
- Between 2007 and 2012, the amount of land in farms in Maine increased from 1,347,566 acres to 1,454,104 acres, a 7.9 percent increase .
- In 2012, the average farm size in Maine was 178 acres, a 7.2 percent increase over 2007 when the average farm was 166 acres.
- The number of farms by size increased in five of the seven categories in 2012, compared to the 2007 data. The number of farms having 10 to 49 acres dropped slightly from 2,383 farms in 2007 to 2,278 farms in 2012, a 4.4 percent decrease; the number of farms having 50 to 179 acres dropped from 3,019 farms in 2007 to 2,794 farms in 2012, a 7.5 percent decrease.

*Note: A farm is "any place from which \$1,000 of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the Census year."*

Go to [www.agcensus.usda.gov](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov) for more information on the 2012 Census.

Change in Number of Farms, 2007 to 2012



Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture, Preliminary Report.

## 2013 Digital Photo Contest 1st Place Winners



**Category:** *Before and After—Farm Bill Conservation Practices*

**Photographer:** *Candi Gilpatric, Agricultural Engineer, Lewiston Field Office*



**Category:** *On the Farm*

**Photographer:** *David Garcelon  
District Conservationist  
Machias Field office*

**Category:** *Maine Nature at It's Best*

**Photographer:** *Amanda Burton  
Soil Conservationist  
Augusta Field office*

